

**House Agriculture Committee Meeting
May 16, 2018
Testimony by Michelle Spranger**

- I am a resident of Southfield, Michigan.
- I am a board member with Michigan Pet Fund Alliance.
- I am in opposition of House Bills 5916 and 5917.

Up until 2 weeks ago, I knew very little about puppy mills and pet stores that sell puppies. I only knew what I had learned firsthand from my experience as a volunteer at different animal shelters and from fostering puppies from my local shelter. Discarded momma dogs and unwanted puppies fill our shelters. In 2016, Michigan animal shelters took in 10,049 puppies under the age of 6 months. Michigan animal shelters killed a total of 4,469 dogs that year.

Mr. Chairman (Representative Barrett), on May 2nd during this committee meeting, you asked Pam Sordyl from Puppy Mill Awareness of Southeast Michigan if she was aware of ethical pet stores that sell puppies. I thought that was a good question. After doing my own research, I believe the answer to your question is No.

I believe it is unethical to commercially produce and sell puppies solely to make money while our shelters are taking in and killing thousands of dogs every year.

I personally know responsible dog breeders and responsible dog breeders do not sell their puppies to pet stores.

I believe it is unethical to support an industry that abuses dogs, like the puppy mill industry does.

At that very same meeting on May 2nd, John Stottele, who is the owner of The Family Puppy, gave testimony to this committee that he "was not aware of any complaints". I believe his statement is False.

The Family Puppy has turned off the "reviews" section on their Facebook page and the comments section on their YouTube channel, but if you google The Family Puppy, you'll find reviews like:

- This one-star review from 3 weeks ago: "Some of the puppies looked really underweight."
- Another one-star review from 3 weeks ago: "Dogs seem very lethargic and unhappy."
- Another one-star google review says: "When moving puppies between their locations, they stuff as many pups into a carrier as physically possible and that's just the tip of the iceberg."
- A one-star review from 1 month ago: "Felt like getting cheated into a deal ... The puppy was sick to top it off! They would not accept he was sick until I had the vet contact."
- A review from 3 months ago: "I just bought a siberian husky from this place ... my dog was infected with Giardia. I took her to the vet and she has been on medication for almost a month and its torture trying to get rid of the infection!!
- From 4 months ago: "This place is horrible. I walked in with my daughter and couldn't believe the filthy and cramped conditions these animals have to live in. The smell made me sick to my stomach."
- Another one-star review from 4 months ago: "I would NEVER recommend anyone to purchase a family pet from this store. May it be from the living conditions down to the dogs having water parasites! ... The dogs have hardly any room to move and the dogs are sick!
- From 7 months ago: "This store is just sad. It smells like urine and we witnessed two puppies being grabbed by their heads and being thrown back into their cage by the guy in the back."
- From 2 years ago: "I purchased a Norwegian Elkhound here in January 2016 ... Two days later she was in an emergency vet in the middle of the night for not eating, not drinking and lack of energy. Come to find out she had coccidia and giardia. She also had a UTI. I called Family Puppy to ask why she was cleared if she was so sick and if the vet check they did on her before I picked her up consisted of a urine sample. The manager said they did not. Apparently the vet check only consisted of looking at them!!! The parasites and UTI were so entirely hard to get rid of that for the first two months of her time with me, she was sick and on medication."

- Another review from 2 years ago: "I recently purchased a golden retriever that we love. The problem is he has Giardia which is an infectious parasite. Although his treatment is covered, the question is why was he cleared for adoption? We have other pets in our house that are now at risk of contracting this parasite ... I have tried to contact The Family Puppy twice through their "Contact Us" tab on their website but have had no response. I would prefer not to write a bad review but under the circumstances I felt the need to make others aware."

NBC25 covered a story about a puppy that was purchased from his store with many health problems. In the story, Mr. Stottele told NBC25 that out of every 50 puppies his store sells, only two percent have health issues. That's one out of every 50.

- o Source: <http://nbc25news.com/news/local/puppy-mill-protestors-picket-pet-store>

A representative from The Family Puppy responded to several complaints to the Better Business Bureau, including this one: "I purchased a shih-tzu mixed with Maltese puppy from this location. The first day I brought him home he was pooping all over my carpet. I quickly took him to the vet only to find out the dog had an infectious disease called Giardia that can be transferred to humans ... I exchanged my dog for a Havanese puppy who before I brought him home tested for Giardia which they said they would treat him for and clear him before coming home. I am not quite sure if they did or just plain lied cause the same thing happened to this dog he was pooping foul smelling diarrhea over my carpet only to find out he has Giardia and coccidia ... They also include AKC pet insurance which when I called them they told me it voids the warranty if the puppy was sick at time of purchase!"

- o Source: <https://www.bbb.org/detroit/business-reviews/pet-shop/the-family-puppy-in-troy-mi-11003259/reviews-and-complaints?section=reviews>

According to The Family Puppy website, they have sold puppies to more than 27,000 families. With 1 out of every 50 puppies sold from his store having health issues, how can the owner of The Family Puppy claim he is unaware of any complaints?

These bills would not require pet store licensing or inspections.

- Michigan pet stores are not currently licensed or inspected by any agency.
- The MDARD website states: "Please note that as of August 2009, MDARD has suspended the licensing and regulating of pet stores, including inspecting pet stores and responding to complaints, due to state financial constraints."
- o Source: https://www.michigan.gov/mdard/0,4610,7-125-1572_2873-343986--,00.html

Local enforcement of pet stores is not going to ensure breeders in distant states follow the highest standards when breeding.

- The real problems lie at the commercial kennels and happen long before the puppies arrive in the stores.
- Poor breeding practices and lack of veterinary care are two of the biggest problems that are not easily fixed with more regulations. In fact, puppies arriving into Michigan from the industry's new "showcase" kennels have many abnormalities listed on their health certificates, including genetic issues as a result of poor breeding.
- The USDA only licenses large-scale breeders who have 15 or more breeding female dogs. USDA standards are shockingly low and the USDA does a horrible job of enforcing these dangerously low standards.
- Enforcement authorities have no way of knowing if USDA-licensed breeders have any violations because this information is no longer publicly available from the USDA.
- Small breeders with less than 15 dogs are completely unregulated and unlicensed.

Consumers who purchase puppies from pet stores are being misled and their complaints are going unanswered. House Bills 5916 and 5917 would protect animal abusers and their pet store outlets. Please oppose these bills.

Thank you.